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THE BODY IN THE REALM OF DESIRE: GENDERED IMAGES ON THE HORIZON OF THE DIVINE[1]

THE PLACE OF BODY, SOUL, AND GOD

If cataphatic (positive) mystical experience is characterised as an attributive sensible awareness of the presence of God, what role, we might ask, does the understanding of the place of body and soul play in conceptualizing divinity? Is the body to be held near or far in finding the approach to God? Is the soul a way station or a first point of departure on the track to God? This paper will explore these issues with particular reference to the mystical experiences of the beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg (ca. 1208–ca. 1282). By way of introduction I shall consider in broad outline the historically gendered conception of the relationship between the body, soul, and God, principally in consideration to the Platonic and Aristotelian underpinnings of the medieval Christian understanding. I shall then consider in some detail the particular mystical insights of Mechthild, for whom the body seems to stand, even if tentatively, in a conjunctive and advantageous relationship to the soul, as she reaches for God.

Plato variously and ambiguously presented his own thinking and that of Socrates on the issue of the nature and relationship of *psychē* and *sōma*, soul and body (Robinson 2000).[2] In the *Phaedo* the body is an impediment to the soul's quest for acquiring truth and wisdom, and the philosophers ought to turn away from its confusing sensibilities. Although the prevailing general opinion was that the soul dissolved after the death of the body, Socrates instead said that the soul is "something immortal" (73a; cf. 76c), which is invisible and unchangeable (79). The pure soul, one that "had no willing association with the body in life," can look forward to communing with the gods free of human ills, while the impure soul, one "bewitched by physical desires and pleasures" is made heavy and wanders as a shadowy phantom (80e–81d). Those who love learning realize that the soul is imprisoned by the desirous nature of the body, and they shall know that the soul will be free to see by its perspicacity that which is really true; what is, in other words, intelligible and invisible, rather than what is sensible and visible (82e–83b). In the *Republic* a tripartite soul, made up of rational, appetitive and spirited parts, reflects the three classes that make up the ideal city, namely the deliberative, money-making, and auxiliary. If working in harmonious interaction these will constitute "the community of all three parts" (442c), but if otherwise, civil war will ensue. Arguing from this perspective, Plato considers that the soul is the locus of all desires, even if those desires actually operate via the body; moreover, balance rather than warfare between body and soul now becomes important (Robinson 2000, 46). He continues this theme in the *Timaeus*, where he says the craftsman of this world (*dēmiourgos*), in fashioning the body out of the elements, located the tripartite soul in the head, thorax and belly. Each part is distinct, with its own motions, which must be maintained in harmonious balance. The human soul, woven together with the fabric of the corporeal body, is the image of the cosmic soul, which is itself woven together with the fabric of the universal body. Nevertheless, the craftsman "gave priority and seniority to the soul, both in its coming to be and in the degree of its excellence, to be the body's mistress and to rule over it as her subject" (34c). In the *Phaedrus*, the soul is an eternal thing in motion which generates thereby motion in what it

encapsulates (245c–e). Finally, for Plato, beauty is radiant, in the philosopher's heaven, but once "buried in this thing we are carrying around now, which we call a body, locked in it like an oyster in its shell," the senses may only serve to cloud that ultimate vision (250c).

In like manner to Plato, Aristotle's thinking on the soul-body relationship is not always clearly defined; it apparently alters over time (or fluctuates), and otherwise depends on the contextual approach he takes of metaphysics or biology (Menn 2002; Sorabji 1993; van der Eijk 2000). During his early association with Plato's school Aristotle acknowledged the so-called two-substance theory, of the body as being "the tomb or prison in which the soul's exile is spent" (Hardie 1964, 54). He later moderated this view, setting out in his treatise *On the Soul (De Anima)* a doctrine of the soul as the entelechy of the body, where he defines the soul "as the first actuality (*entelecheia*) of a natural body potentially possessing life" (2.1, 412a27–28).[3] He advocated a so-called hylomorphic view, from the Greek *hylē*, matter and *morphē*, shape or form. In effect, a human being is a conjunction, "a besouled body or embodied soul, formed matter or enmattered form" (Hardie 1964, 54). So according to Aristotle, the body (*sōma*) and soul (*psychē*) is a substance (*ousia*) compounded of matter (*hylē*) and form (*eidos*), with matter being the potentiality that is realized or actualized by form. The soul is the "dynamic structure and the organizational pattern according to which, and for the purpose of which, the physical body is shaped, constituted, and internally arranged" (van der Eijk 2000, 63). It is the essence, that which gives life to a thing. "If the eye were a living creature," Aristotle says, "its soul would be its vision" (*De anima* 2.1, 412b18–19). The soul is furthermore characterised by the faculties of nutrition, sensation, and thought, which feature distinctively and hierarchically in plants, animals and humans (2.4). Thus the soul is composed of "powers" (*dynameis*) or "parts" (*moria*), which together animate the body, and which inseparably constitute its being (van der Eijk 2000, 64). As "the cause and first principle of the living body," the soul teleologically drives the body according to its nature: "for all natural bodies are instruments of the soul" (*De anima* 2.4, 415b8, 18–19). The "affections of the soul" (such as thoughts, sensations and emotions) are evident in the material body as physiological effects (van der Eijk 2000, 66). Basically, the soul does not move by virtue of itself, and it has no location or place. In that respect it is like the attribute of colour, which does not have a location except as it inheres in a thing, and that thing may be moved. By analogy (but not by exact correspondence), the soul as a substantial unity originates perception, motion and psychological processes (Witt 1992).[4] Imagination (*phantasia*), for Aristotle, is a movement in the soul, a reception of images presented to us, produced by sensations actively operating, and upon which we form an opinion (*De anima* 3.3, 7). Similarly, desire is a movement that is generated in the soul by an object, and is neither entirely a physiological, nor entirely a mental process; it is rather "an efficient cause of action towards [an] end" (Sorabji 2000, 180). As such, the affective relationship of body and soul is one that is predicated on desire.

In the view of Plato the soul may be neutrally sexed, and the body represents a hindrance to be overcome. This idea foreshadowed a detrimental understanding for the position of women.[5] As Ruether (2002, 187) points out, while women may have been seen as having the image of God as gender neutral soul, platonic dualism gave philosophical justification to the notion that woman, as female body, does not possess the image of God. Especially influential for the early Christians was Plato's *Timaeus*, with its cosmicization of human being and the search for a lost unity (Louth 1997, 114–16). Louth explains that Origen had posited the idea of a double creation, in which pure spiritual beings turned away from

free contemplation of God and fell into becoming souls with terrestrial bodies. This was taken up by Greek patristic and Byzantine theology, in regard to the heavenly state imagined as a singular sexually undifferentiated state (though even here the female was subsumed into the male). It served to validate the supremacy of celibacy, which was considered to be a state of being that anticipates the singular angelic condition of resurrection. This view gradually shifted under the influence of Augustine, for whom sexual differentiation is maintained in the Resurrection. He considered that the bodies of men and women are not a divergence from the unity of God that must be overcome, but just the exteriorized container of the spiritualized self, the soul, which must be made open to the Word of God. As Louth writes: "Augustine's logic of inwardness made of the body an index of inwardness and a means of communication, [and] perhaps lies behind the enormous importance of the bodily in *female* mysticism in the Middle Ages…" (1997, 125).

According to Bynum (1995a), Augustine's viewpoint "fundamentally shaped the medieval discussion" on resurrection (94–95), and "[h]is repeated emphasis on the yearning of the separated soul for body…becomes an important component of the medieval notion of flesh as essential to personhood" (100–1). By the thirteenth century the proximity of body and soul came to be accepted in terms generally of Aristotelian hylomorphism; so theologians agreed that the person is a psychosomatic whole, not simply a soul using a body.[6] Albert the Great (1193–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) espoused a doctrine known as "formal identity," in which the body was the matter to the soul's form, with death severing that connection. Although the soul could subsist apart from body, the self was incomplete without the ontological joint that is body and soul. The soul then is a guarantor of self, in being "the one form of body (*unica forma corporis*)"; and, "body [is] the expression of that soul in matter." So Aquinas can claim "[i]t is more correct to say that soul contains body [continent corpus] and makes it to be one, then the converse" (259; bracketed phrase in original). The soul is the identifying activator to the potentializing factor of body. Bynum argues that the Schoolmen "were fascinated and confused by the body-soul nexus, and, . . . they held the body to be a drag that retards soul, an instrument that improves its performance, and an unfolding that *is* its expression" (260–61). In heaven, in accordance with the integral notion, sex difference continues, and is for ever maintained (265). Without a body, the soul is but a mute fragment: "The blueprint of all we are—our shape and size, our gender and intellectual capacity, our status and merit—may be carried in soul, but it is realized in body. Without bodily expression, there is no human being (*homo*), no person, no self" (269). This theory of formal identity was not accepted unquestioningly at the time. Bynum concludes that while in the dichotomous platonic view the soul may be neutral, in the Aristotelian integrative view the soul can be considered as essentially gendered.

For Bonaventure (1221–74) the person was understood as a marriage of soul (bridegroom) and body (beloved virgin), thus making resurrection a condition of desire. Desire is indeed central: "it is the metaphysical cement binding body to soul" (Bynum 1995a, 254). He describes the glorified body in heaven in luminous and crystalline terms; moreover, "[i]t is a body-soul-self: a particularized, experiencing, glowing, and, at least partially, sensual person, moving ever deeper into delight" (ibid.). So, just as the body desires the soul, the soul desires and yearns for the body, since they are enwrapped. There is an overflowing consistency to the self as the presence of the body completes the soul. The desire of soul for body is finally requited at resurrection, even if the body has to submit to its, the soul's, rule. Only at this point will the soul-body be able to enjoy the

beatific vision of God. Hence the fulfilment of desire was stasis, and heaven was *requies aeterna*, where longing was satiated and stilled. Bynum goes on to say that within devotional literature and religious poetry, by contrast, this view altered such that desire came to be seen as continuing. It was apparently often located in the body, not just in spirit. Even so, the body was still referred to disparagingly, and hence the *Ancrene Wisse*, written early in the thirteenth century for female recluses, "spoke of the flesh as a privy hole, slime and stench, clods and mud, a 'prison,' a 'torture-chamber,' a 'foreign-country' for the soul"; yet its heavenly counterpart "will be glorious, light, and beautiful" (331). The fleshly body is a drag, but also a companion, which at the end, in resurrection, will be glorified. Metaphorically, we might say that the body is an anchor for the soul, which stops the ship of the soul in the material sea for a while, before being drawn up and allowing the self to sail away. In addition, for Bynum, Mechthild exemplifies the view of body and soul as travelling together, of the body as "a vehicle that carries us to heaven" (339). While Mechthild could agree with Augustine "that we *are* our desire" she could also acknowledge, unlike Augustine, "that desire must lodge in an embodied self" (340).

The influence of Aristotle's philosophy on academic thought in the later Middle Ages was profound and not generally favourable for the position of women (Allen 2002, chap. 2). Aristotle had argued, in the *Generation of Animals*, that "the female is as it were a deformed male" (cited by ibid., 48). In consequence, as Allen suggests, "the qualities of the nature of form as active, efficient cause, better, more divine, and superior [became] linked with the male identity and the nature of matter as inferior with the female identity" (99). Basically, on Aristotelian principles, the male is hotter, which enables him to "cook" life-giving seed, and the female is colder, which only insufficiently enables her to heat her blood to produce seed (100). This biased view extended to Aristotle's political theorizing, in which the superior rational faculty of men's souls fitted them to rule over the inferior nature of women's souls. Women supposedly also have a lesser measure of virtue (101–9). Both Albert and Thomas followed Aristotle in devaluing the position of women in relation to men, although it was done within a doctrinal context of men and women as the image and likeness of God. In that respect at least the mundane gender polarity was transformed into a divine complementarity (144, 148). As previously noted, Aquinas opined that "a human being is incomplete without his or her body," and "[h]uman essence includes having a particular gendered body" (Allen 2002, 140). He freely admits that the body is valuable as far as it conduces towards its end—namely resurrected life with God; but it was the operation of the rational soul that determined that final state, and men demonstrated by nature a superior intellect (Commo McLaughlin 1974).

Although scholastic authors in the period eleventh to fourteenth centuries variously expatiated on the gender differences of females and males, the understanding of feminine and masculine types was more nuanced than a simple dimorphism might suggest, argues Cadden (1993, chap. 6). Gender traits were broadly abstracted to levels of symbolism and metaphysics, as represented in theological and scientific language, and this consequently allowed a certain tolerance of sexual ambiguity and gender mixes; however, a countervailing tendency sought to enforce binary gender definitions. Bynum argues (1986) that the notion of woman as a "marked category," as contrasted to, and considered weaker than the male, came to be projected metaphysically, such that in medieval mysticism the world was conceived as female, and the divine imagined as male; since matter was lower than (subordinate to) spirit, this implied that the female was lower than (subordinate to) the male. So if men wanted to humble themselves before God they could use feminine imagery to do so; and likewise if women wanted to be elevated to God they

must take on masculine attributes—or at least that was what male writers assumed was necessary. Bynum further asserts that while women were aware of the patriarchal assumptions of the age about their role, and their abilities, they did not necessarily conform to them. They saw themselves as physical beings, and used "images that continued ordinary female roles (bride, child, mother) and stereotypical female behavior (vulnerability, illness, bleeding)" (1986, 274). In other words, "they reached God not by reversing what they were but by sinking more fully into it" (ibid.).

These particular notions of gender shaped the medieval understanding of what constitutes mystical experience, and arose out of earlier conceptions (Jantzen 1995, chap. 4). Origen had advocated the path of purgation, illumination and contemplation as the way of return to God. This involved a derogation of the sensual body as it serviced the analogical spiritual senses in the soul. Men were supposedly more naturally imbued with reasoning capacity which allowed them to divine the mystical meaning of scripture. It is, argues Origen, actually the desire for knowledge of God that leads to spiritual union, not love (88–95). For Pseudo-Dionysius God is reached through a transcending intellectual endeavour, a passing beyond ignorance into a noetic union, into an ecstasy of "dazzling darkness" (108). Eckhart exemplified this intellectualized understanding of *unio mystica*. He acknowledged the equal spiritual capabilities of women, but this did not necessarily extend to their gender roles in society, and he adopted the general view of women as sensual and exhibiting inferior reason, while men exhibited superior reason (114). There was hence a gendered apportionment in his mystical understanding in that union with God required detaching oneself from the female inferior intellect (which is conjoined with the body), and dwelling instead in the male superior intellect, wherein resides the true image of God. The darkness of unknowing he considered metaphorically male, while the light that shines through this darkness is the "cloudy" knowledge that is derived by the metaphorically female senses (115). Accordingly, "genuine mysticism must invoke the 'male' reason, not the 'female' sensory faculties, and … therefore the visionary experiences could not be considered spiritually significant" (118). The male is ultimately identified with the active and knowing God and the female with the passive and unknowing world (122). Such speculative association of the feminine with the physical and sexual spheres, and the masculine with the spiritual and intellectual spheres, is referenced by the notion of spiritual progress: from the earthly to the heavenly. How then does a woman become spiritual? Simply by becoming more like a man; that is, to be governed by reason. A man meanwhile has only to aspire to his own unembodied perfection (130).

Bynum (1982) has also shown how maternal images of Jesus were employed by Cistercian monks in the twelfth century to indicate a dependent form of union. With the prevailing tendency of using "metaphors drawn from human relationships" to describe the interaction with God, this provided a way of talking about union without resorting to sexualized imagery (ibid., 161). For medieval religious men who would speak of unification with a male God, the metaphor of sexual union presented a problem since homosexual allusions were considered to be unacceptable. Lochrie (1987, 187) refers to this conundrum as the "heterosexual crisis." A way round this issue was to feminize the soul, as the mediating element between humans and God, which could conjoin with the male God (Christ), and which enabled the *unio mystica* to be understood sexually yet still maintain the conventions of behaviour. This is what Friedrich Sunder (1254–1328) did, when he reportedly used "highly erotic language to describe the encounters between his soul (feminine) and Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom" (McGinn 1998, 315). It is significant

that Mechthild (as we shall see), regularly writes of her encounters with God in erotic terms, of his greeting, embracing, and caressing her in what amounts to a metaphorical mapping of physical sensual experience onto the divine realm. If then, according to Christian metaphysics, the soul and body (materiality) are conceptualized as feminine, we have the sequence God→soul→body corresponding with masculine→feminine→ feminine.[7] Furthermore, if male mystics wish to picture themselves in a spiritual marriage, maintaining God as male, and soul as female, then there seems no place for the body considered as a substantial presence. These men can be abstracted from their bodiliness, and there is consequently a tendency to seek escape from it, in order to achieve a putative final union. However women, in conformation with the Christian paradigm, are able to take into account their bodiliness while still picturing God as masculine. The soul for them is integrated with the body (matter as feminine), and they have no need to disregard it or try to reach beyond it, as male mystics might be inclined to do. Men are, in this affective scenario, alienated from their bodies; but women are not (or need not be), and so are more fully human. Mechthild and other beguine mystics positively assert that their humanity includes their bodies.

MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG

Mechthild of Magdeburg belongs to the movement known as the beguines, and over the last thirty years especially the spirituality evidenced by these women has become a focus of attention. Leading lives of voluntary poverty, chastity and religious devotion, outside of approved religious orders, these women came to prominence during the thirteenth century, in the region of northern France, the Low Countries and the Rhineland (see Grundmann 1995; McDonnell 1969). For some, the exercise of spirituality was realized as intense mystical experiences, and it demonstrated a decidedly somatic nature, in that the body assumed a significant position in relation to the understanding of God (McGinn 1998, chap. 5). In the high Middle Ages women were deemed to be more open to such "spiritual visions," which however were accorded lower status than the "intellectual visions" of male mystics; and these somatized experiences were considered to be an unreliable witness of the presence of God (Elliot 1997). For those beguines who were exponents of a so-called "bridal mysticism," the idea of Love founded on acute desire was the motivating factor for seeking the symbolic embrace of the bridal soul and bridegroom spirit (Christ). These women were guided by a sense of urgency, which inevitably ended in a collision with the divine, and the force of that impact was revealed by their use of severe imagery. They saw, so to speak, the glassy shatter of love that is the beautiful countenance of God. In this light, and extending Bynum's analogy, the body-soul is the car that travels on the highway to heaven. Mechthild is especially interesting because of the power of her image-making; she well used her bodily and spiritual senses to articulate a perception of the reality of the presence of God in her life. Indeed, she explicitly says that her ability to write derives from seeing with the eyes of her soul, hearing with the ears of her eternal spirit, and feeling in all the parts of her body the power of the Holy Spirit (see Tobin 1998, 156).

Mechthild was born in the vicinity of the town of Magdeburg in Lower Saxony, around the year 1208. In her early twenties, she left home to go to Magdeburg and become a beguine. The impetus for this pursuit of a religious life seems to have been an experience at the age of twelve in which, so she later recounted, she was "greeted" by the Holy Spirit. It was an ecstatic experience of mystical union. This was apparently a recurring experience for at least the next thirty-one years, during which time she suffered from

ongoing ill health. About 1250 she revealed these experiences to her Dominican confessor, Heinrich of Halle, who commanded her to write about them. Over the next three decades she composed seven books, which were published together as *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, or *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*.[8] The original manuscript, written mostly in medieval Low German, is now lost, and only Latin and Middle High German versions survive (Tobin 1995, 1–14). The choice of Mechthild's originally writing in the vernacular, as against having her experiences transcribed into Latin, was a calculated one, argues Poor (2001), as it aligned her with the current Dominican efforts to preach to the unlearned, and "enabled both her and her confessors to avoid the potential charge that she was preaching or teaching in a transgressive (i.e., public) way" (229). Mechthild employs disparate literary forms, including "visions, auditions, dialogues, prayers, hymns, letters, allegories, parable, narratives, as well as features of the courtly lyric, magic spells, the tract, the hagiographical life and the disputation" (Anderson 2000, p. 15). Anderson asserts that, although as a result, her writing is not easily categorised in terms of an overarching genre, still it has a certain literary integrity by virtue of the special place of Mechthild as author in a polyphonic setting (ibid., 94-98). In drawing extensively on imagistic and metaphoric language Mechthild establishes a compelling motif for understanding the powerful experience of mystical union (see Hollywood 1995, 57–86; Newman 1995, 137–167; and Schulze-Belli 1999).

THE REALM OF DESIRE

The defining element in Mechthild's mystical writings is her desire for God. When her longing ecstatically takes her to the divine court she gazes upon the face of God, and knows that in her boundless longing she truly reflects his own lovesick desire (*FL* 43–44; I, 4). During these encounters Mechthild is "overwhelmed" ("verwunden") by God's wonder and "crushed" ("verdruket") by his grace (*FL* 47; I, 14). The "noble countenance" ("edeln antlútes") of the bridegroom Christ dazzles her into blindness, and she radiantly shines in his reflected effulgence. Their reciprocating desire sees her become incandescent (*FL* 49–50; I, 22.7–34). In an extended metaphor in Chapter 44 of Book I she describes a consummated mystical desire. Accompanied by her chamberlains, the five senses, and suitably clothed in the virtues, she contrives to dance with her lover (Christ), here represented as a "young man" ("jungeling"). For Mechthild it is a game of love she plays with the divine, as seen by her coy reluctance to join Christ for a tryst in "the shade of the spring, into the bed of love" ("dem brunnenschatten in das bette der minne"), whence he invites her; first though she must untether the chamberlain senses. It is they who are afraid to venture upon the Godhead, which "is so blazing hot" ("ist so fúrig heis") that they fear they will "go completely blind" ("erblinden gar"). Mechthild claims to be unready; but the soul responds that it is as according to her nature to desire to go to God. So she then proceeds to her lover "in the secret chamber of the invisible Godhead" ("in die verholnen kammeren der unsúnlichen gotheit") where she strips from herself "fear and shame and all external virtues" ("vorhte und schame und alle uswendig tugent"), leaving her only naked in her irreducible longing for God, and he fulfils her forever with his "limitless lavishness" ("endelosen miltekeit"). The evocative power of this experience resonates through to her old age (see *FL* 314; VII, 45.12–28).

If love is aspirational towards God it is shown as being in movement. According to Mechthild, the yearning for love is sweetly anguishing, while the silence of love is an effortless pleasure; but, she says, "the body knows nothing of what love does in stillness",

and indeed, pure love is a restful unity of will with God (*FL* 135; III, 24.26–27 "was si stille werket, das es der licham nit enweis!"). This could be interpreted as an implicit acceptance of the theological doctrine that desire reaches an end with the state of resurrection, on the basis that the ecstatic condition is just a prelibation of the heavenly condition. However, in a later book she writes that the pure love of God is typified by four things that never rest: "growing desire," "flowing suffering," "burning sensation in soul and body" and "constant union bound to great vigilance" (*FL* 158).[9] She paradoxically refers to the rapturous soul as being "both swift and at rest" (*FL* 162; IV, 18.74–75 "beide snel und stille"). Mechthild fears that the death of the body will mean she will be unable to suffer or offer praise to Jesus. God assures her however that her longing is eternal and will keep striving until the last day, upon which "soul and body shall be reunited" (*FL* 241; VI, 15.12–13 "so kumt wider zesamne sel und lip"). If love is moving desire, and if this love is reciprocal then God too is in movement through desire. Mechthild has God referring to himself as a free-flowing spring; but if a person is recalcitrant then "the restless Godhead that continually toils without toil cannot flow into his soul" (*FL* 207).[10] In a vision of the Holy Trinity conceived by the "sweet flowing" of her soul she sees the soul of Jesus, who has a "delightful labor in blissful restlessness", and who, by constantly moving the Godhead, recalls "to the heavenly Father the infinite love he has for the human soul" (*FL* 245).[11] She compares becoming conscious of God with the flight of a bird (*FL* 329; VII, 61.2–11). If a bird should remain too long on the ground its feathers will become heavy, but if it should fly it will become exhilarated and only briefly return to earth. Similarly, "[w]e should raise the feathers of our longing to God" ("Wir sollen die vederen únser gerunge iemer uf wegen zuo gotte"). In this way, the "wings of love" ("minnen vlúgel") will take away "earthly pleasure" ("irdenschen wollust").[12]

This unending desire for love generates a sense of being wounded. As a beginning, the Trinity desires to create human souls so that they might share in the bliss and enduring love that existed between the three persons: "I shall make a bride for myself who shall greet me with her mouth and wound me with her beauty. Only then does love really begin" (*FL* 114–15).[13] While Mechthild's soul complains that Lady Love has dealt her "many a cudgel blow" ("manigen kúlenschlag"), which is surely destined to kill her, Love responds that on the day of the body's death she will be ready to steal away Mechthild's soul and return her to her lover. It will then be upon the meadow with flowers of all kinds that she will lie "buried in God" ("in gotte begraben") (*FL* 42–43; I, 3). So the force of longing desire is all powerful and acute, sharp enough to cut into Mechthild's being (see especially *FL* 92–96; II, 25). And the absence from her object of love becomes painful and anguishing; indeed, "the violent force of love" impressed itself upon her (*FL* 143; IV, 2.116 "dú gewaltige minne"). Mechthild would fain "die of love in love" in the bed of suffering with Christ (*FL* 294; VII, 21.47 "sterben muesse von minne in der minne"), and she asks the maidservant of Love, Lady Hope, to bind all the wounds of her heart which love has inflicted upon her (*FL* 318; VII, 48.68–69). Near the end of her life Mechthild announces that she can no longer endure the wounds of love that God has inflicted upon her (*FL* 327; VII, 58). This pain of love cuts both ways, for Mechthild as for God. Christ Jesus urges Mechthild to join him in the exemplary duty of martyrdom and suffer being "pierced in [the] heart by constant union" (*FL* 54; I, 29.14 "in din herze gestochen mit steter einunge"). One's health can only be restored by a continuing interaction with God (*FL* 79–80; II, 15). Hence love, the epitome of God, is extolled mightily as the conduit of fierce desire (*FL* 210–12; V, 30). It is clear that for Mechthild God shows the quality of love above all else, and the sense of her enthusiastic desire for union is boldly expressed,

as in for example: "[b]ut when you love, we two become one being" (*FL* 76); "I am in you / And you are in me" (*FL* 111); and "[w]hen she [*sc.* the soul] is completely dissolved into God" (*FL* 117).[14] It is not quite identification though, as she affirms when she has a vision of heaven, and of being with God, in that place wherein lies that "special intimacy with separation" (*FL* 70–71; II, 3.8 "sundertruten mit underscheide").[15]

Mechthild evinces due humility and self-effacement before God, claiming to be unworthy, and worthless.[16] She denigrates herself, perhaps most sharply in chapter 1 of book VI:

> When I, the most wretched of persons, go to my prayer, I deck myself out according to my worthlessness. I dress myself in the foul puddle that I myself am. Then I put on the shoes of precious time that I wasted day after day. Then I gird myself with the suffering I have caused. Then I put on a cloak of wickedness of which I am full. Then I put on my head a crown of secret shameful acts that I have committed against God. After this I take in my hand the mirror of true knowledge. Then I look at myself in it and see who I really am. Alas, I see nothing but utter misery." (*FL* 226–27)[17]

When receiving the Eucharist she is so demeaned in the "mirror of [her] sins" that she cannot understand God's kindness that he should "bow down to the filthy puddle of [her] heart" (*FL* 292).[18] The lack of self-esteem carries through to the attitude she takes towards her body, which is generally treated with disdain at best, and contempt at worst. It is, she says, "a beast of burden" which is "bridled with worthlessness" (*FL* 64; I, 46.37–38). She likens herself to a dog, and her body to a mongrel. So, in complaining that it is an arduous process to purify the soul, Mechthild contrasts the joyful contact with Christ with the "anguish" arising from "the stench of that dead mongrel, my body…" (*FL* 112).[19] The physical body is viewed as revolting. Indeed, Mechthild recollects a vision of herself near the choir of angels, her countenance reflecting their brilliance, and she laments: "Alas, foul puddle that I am, what is happening to me? Unfortunately I am not nearly as blessed as I saw myself there" (*FL* 74).[20] During her encounter with two devils, amanuenses of Lucifer, one of them pretends to be angelic and offers worship to Mechthild. She responds with dismissal: "No grace shall be given to you because you worship a foul cesspool" (*FL* 141).[21] She contends that in receiving the Eucharist "the Godhead unites itself to our innocent soul and God's humanity mixes itself with our hideous body" (*FL* 150–151).[22] The body is seen as a key area for the cause of sin, especially as it gives way to "the desires of our miserable flesh and … [the] lust and the weakness of the human senses" (*FL* 197).[23] This ill-feeling extends to the material world itself. Mechthild enjoins religious sisters to aspire to reach towards God's "flowing sweetness," beyond the "eternal shame" of "wallowing in muck" (*FL* 190; V, 11.32–33). Similarly, she instructs religious superiors on how they should conduct themselves towards those in their care, citing how Christ the Redeemer came "down from the lofty palace of the Holy Trinity into this stench-oozing world" (*FL* 223).[24]

What of the relationship of the body and soul in Mechthild's mystical outlook? In an early account of her ecstatic flight her body is awakened upon the enforced return of her soul, and the following conversation ensues:

> Then the body speaks: "Well, woman, just where have you been? You come back so love-struck, lovely, and vibrant, free and witty. Your carrying on has cost me my appetite, sense of smell, color, and all my strength."
> She [*sc.* the soul] says: "Shut up, murderer! Quit your bellyaching. I'll always be on my guard with you around. That my enemy has been wounded—what do we care about that? It makes me glad." (*FL* 41)[25]

So while the soul is content to flow into the embrace of the Trinity, the body resents the absence of its soul on the journey; but that is of no consequence to the soul, who is not concerned if the body should perish (*FL* 44–45; I, 5). It is a battlefield. When Mechthild entered religious life she saw that the body was armed against her poor soul: "I saw full well that it was my enemy, and I also saw if I were going to escape eternal death, I would have to strike it down; conflict was inevitable" (*FL* 143).[26] She thought that the way to subdue the body was by the passion of Jesus Christ; accordingly, throughout her youth Mechthild delivered "great defensive blows" upon her body, through "sighing, weeping, confessing, fasting, keeping vigils, scourging with rods, and constant adoration" (*FL* 143).[27] The body is seen as an encumbrance, and as something to be endured until the day when Mechthild can join God in a soulful embrace; in the meantime she has to wait "in this miserable body" (*FL* 156; IV, 12.104 "in disem armen libe"). As she moves towards death, and perhaps as an unsurprising consequence of her deteriorating condition, she is happy to escape her "wretched body" (*FL* 254; VI, 28.26 "leiden lichamen"). She refers to the body as a house of pain, which is "old, small, and dark" ("alt, clein und vinster"), and in which the "soul lies captive" ("sele inne gevangen lit") (*FL* 316; VII, 48.4–6). The body is not beyond redemption though, and indeed a body that is full of love and free of sin is "a precious jewel" (*FL* 163; IV, 18.95–96 "edel ein cleinoet").

Mechthild seemed to vacillate in her attitude towards the body, which was perhaps attributable to her ongoing illnesses. While she explicitly states that the soul is conformed entirely to the nature of God, her regular pronouncements against the body indicate a less congenial understanding.[28] Yet, a theme gradually emerges in which she acknowledges the final nobility of the body, since it has a complete nature in the Trinity, and indeed she rejoices "that divine nature now includes bone and flesh, body and soul" (*FL* 157).[29] Whereas angels are pure spirits, and secondary, the soul "with its flesh is mistress of the house in heaven," and has the privilege of sitting "next to the eternal Master of the house, and is most like him" (*FL* 157).[30] There seems to have occurred a shift in her thinking, in which the body has assumed some measure of significance, and is not so readily to be dismissed. For in the next chapter, as she speaks of the four things that are required for genuinely loving God, the body is coordinated with the soul; and one must give oneself wholly over to God, both "inwardly and outwardly" (*FL* 158; IV, 15.7–8 "inwendig als uswendig"). On the death of religious people Mechthild went to the grave and "greeted both soul and body" (*FL* 166; IV, 22.7 "gruossete beide sel unde lip"). She praises God for his "generous gifts which you, Lord, have ever deigned to give me *in body and soul*" (*FL* 218, my emphasis).[31] God offers the religious person (that is, Mechthild) a special favour that endows her with dignity, in both body and soul (*FL* 239; VI, 13.25–26). Although she considers herself unworthy on earth she rejoices that God has touched her with his "most sublime sweetness" ("überheren suessekeit"), which utterly permeates her body and soul (*FL* 320; VII, 50). The intimacy of the relationship between God and soul is conveyed by the idea of God clothing himself with the soul as with a garment (*FL* 76; II, 5.3–8).[32] Later, in promoting the value of good works as bringing a person into line with God, she writes that so far as we "burn in love and shine in a holy life, God's love

shall burn in our soul and our body unceasingly forever" (*FL* 301).[33] She seems to suggest a distinction between elevated soul and base soul, the latter being one to whom "God has never spoken lovingly," and who "is so attracted to transitory things" (*FL* 135).[34]

The soul may be in a diminished condition in the body here on earth, but the self will nevertheless exist integrally in a transformed state after death, in heaven (*FL* 182–84; V, 4). As Mechthild surveys the realm of heaven, she acknowledges that after the resurrection the brides will be seated "opposite their Bridegroom and thus shall love come to love, body to soul" (*FL* 105).[35] The body will after all be delivered of its burdensomeness, and will again be together with the soul on the day of Resurrection (*FL* 261; VI, 35). It is meanwhile a "deplorable exile" ("jemerlichen ellende") that is to be endured on earth (*FL* 292; VII, 20.9).[36] So even though the body is a prison in which the soul has been bound their joint salvation will be assessed through obedience (*FL* 335–36; VII, 65). In the celebratory events after the last day, during which Christ will don a magnificent crown, Mechthild refers to his humanity as "an intelligible image of his eternal Godhead," and he "greets, rejoices, and loves his flesh and his blood without ceasing." There the blessed in heaven will "gaze into the mirror of eternity" and thus understand how they were formed in body and soul by the Holy Trinity. Indeed, the two, body and soul, are transparently linked; for "[t]he soul is formed in the body with human qualities but has a divine shimmer about it and shines through the body as radiant gold shines through pure crystal" (*FL* 274).[37] The Holy Trinity, she says, "created us body and soul in infinite love," and so, "Adam and Eve were formed and given a noble nature according to the eternal Son" (*FL* 115).[38] She goes on to affirm that at this stage they had pure bodies, which were without "shameful members," and were "clothed with angels' garments" (*FL* 115).[39] As a consequence of the Fall their bodies became deformed and hideous (ibid.; 46–49). So they were once in an unblemished and virginal state, but fell into exile. We have here, it seems, an allusion to Origen's doctrine of double creation (see *FL* 115; III, 9.40–49). The soul implores God to relieve this distressful situation, and so he then convenes a council in the Holy Trinity. The "eternal Father" seeks to redeem his valuable work of creation—that once "admirable bride" who had become "ugly and hideously deformed". He asks, "Who might accept this filth?" Christ steps forward to offer his redemptive sacrifice (*FL* 116).[40] If Mechthild eulogises Christ's body on earth, and if, as she admits, we are made in the image and likeness of God, then she is led to believe in the worth of the body on earth, at least as a suffering reflection of his embodiment (see *FL* 289–91; VII, 18).

So if the body is caught together with the soul how is this composite being affected by Mechthild's ecstatic experiences? Her "spiritual visions" are apparently to be located in the soul, which takes flight towards God, for a while, before being sunk back to earth by the weight of the body (*FL* 80; II, 18). She says elsewhere that the soul must transcend the second heaven; for even though "she [sc. the soul] tastes an indescribable sweetness / That permeates all her members," this realm is delusional in that it "was created … [b]y the longing of the senses / And by the first stage of love" (*FL* 83).[41] The blessed in heaven may travel about freely in the heavenly realm, moving for ever before the horizon. At one point Mechthild dispatches her longing, here personified, to the house of God on high, to inform him that her soul desires reunion. As the soul rises towards heaven two angels intercept her and ask: "Lady Soul, what are you doing way up here? You are still clothed with dark earth" (*FL* 101).[42] She retorts that the lower the angels go the more they will lose their "celestial splendor" ("suesses himmelbliken"), and the higher she climbs

the brighter she will shine (ibid.; III, 1.18–20). Thus she urges against earthly desires, which can blind the soul into misunderstanding (*FL* 113; III, 7). It requires the guards of discernment and holy fear to check the pleasures of the flesh; for a holy person's home is in heaven not the "prison" ("gevangnisse") of this world (*FL* 230–31; VI, 4).[43] In a telling comment on the immanent nature of God Mechthild writes of being touched by his love, which then enabled her to see that a self-centred attachment to beautiful things on earth can be distracting. Since he greeted her heart, lit up her senses, and blissfully captured her soul, she is aware that the love of God is to be found in "the nobility of creatures, in their beauty and usefulness" ("die edelkeit der creaturen, ir schoeni und ir nutz") (*FL* 231–32; VI, 5).

As Mechthild indicates in her first ecstatic event, she "saw with the eyes of [her] soul in heavenly bliss the beautiful humanity" of Christ, and "recognized in his sublime countenance the Holy Trinity" (*FL* 140).[44] Equally, she sees with the eyes of her soul the fire of God eternal which is radiantly gleaming with "the divine countenance of the Holy Trinity that shall flood our body and soul with light, so that we shall see and know there the marvelous bliss that here we cannot even name" (*FL* 255).[45] The presence of God appears to flow into her and, "[w]ith an indescribable greeting it touches her heart, which shines and glows in such a way that the sublime reflection of the Holy Trinity lingers on her countenance" (*FL* 265).[46] When finally the hour of her death shall come Mechthild desires that God will move close to her, banish her enemies, and let her gaze upon his face so that the eyes of her soul might sparkle in his Godhead (*FL* 219; V, 35.54–60). She perceives the crown of Christ through the "spiritual eyes of the loving soul" (*FL* 271; VII, 1.10 "geistlichen ovgen der minnenden sele"). She honours the "sublime countenance" ("heren antlútes") of God which she sees in heaven (*FL* 314; VII, 45.10–11), and she thanks personified Christian faith for thus illumining the eye of her soul (*FL* 318; VII, 48.71). Indeed, it is through the eyes of knowledge placed in the loving soul that enables Mechthild to gaze "into the eternal mirror" (*FL* 162; IV, 18.56 "in den ewigen spiegel"). She enjoins that we should thank God for the generous gifts he has given the body and soul on earth, and by so doing "our senses are opened, and our soul [is] so resplendent that we look into divine knowledge like someone who sees his own countenance in a bright mirror" (*FL* 281).[47] While she mostly privileges this perceptual sight (cf. *FL* 45; I, 6.2: "listen with spiritual ears," "hoere mit geistlichen oren"), she accepts, in one instance, the spiritual analogue of hearing in an interesting way—that time where she has a vision of the heavenly feast, which she curiously reports as "hearing and seeing" with the eyes of her soul (*FL* 309; VII, 37.34 "gehorte und gesach").

There is a suggestion that divine awareness manifests not only to the spiritual senses in the soul, but that it also manifests through the physical senses. As love grows in Mechthild's soul it longingly flows in ascension to God, whereupon it receives the divine wonder, and thus "dissolves through the soul into the senses" ("smelzet sich dur die sele in die sinne"), thereby refining her body (*FL* 182; V, 4.12–15). She ponders that when she thinks upon death her soul reacts with such anticipatory longing that her "body floats in great superhuman delight and [her] senses recognize ineffable wonders in the departure of the soul" (*FL* 252).[48] God allowed an "unworthy person," namely Mechthild, to "recognize in her senses and see with the eyes of her soul a fire that burned unceasingly…" (*FL* 254).[49] She advises lovers of truth to seek for God, as the bridegroom of the soul, with their "five senses in all things" (*FL* 287; VII, 15.3–4 "fúnf sinnen in allen dingen"). In acknowledging the redemptive presence of God in the Eucharist she will "bow down with our soul and our five senses" (*FL* 293).[50] She entreats God to

awaken her soul from the sleep of temptation, and illumine her senses from the darkness of her flesh (*FL* 296; VII, 26.7–9). To suffer and struggle on earth is to be in accord with Christ's suffering; for pain is invariably caused by the weak human will, since we are "contaminated by the flesh" ("gemenget mit dem vleische"), and if it should be "accepted in good spirit" then one will be ennobled and honoured by God (*FL* 303; VII, 34.9–21). Mechthild cries for mercy from God for her sins, and wants constantly to feel his intense love in her heart, in her soul, in her five senses, and in all her members (*FL* 309; VII, 38). Prosaically, she is enraged by the sin of unbelief, which she feels in her whole soul, her whole body, her five senses, and in her whole heart (*FL* 315; VII, 47.4–5). The extent of the collocation between bodily and divine senses is throughout ambiguous, succinctly illustrated by Mechthild's saying that while the devil can speak only with a person through the senses, God can speak as well directly in the soul, and when this happens there is no awareness of it by the senses (God can also speak to the soul as it is drawn into heaven) (*FL* 251; VI, 23).

Clearly, Mechthild evinced a startling mystical awareness, and her searching for God was based on unwonted desire. It was ever a movement that appeared as a reciprocal flow between heaven and earth. As her ardent desire lights up the being of Christ in her heart, she comes, in this wise, to know the face of the Other, to see by that illumination which "opens a horizon and empties space," and so "delivers being out of nothingness" (Levinas 1969, 44). This encounter with a transcendental relation reveals the overwhelming presence of the conception of God, the one to whom Mechthild speaks the world. In her many allusions to the idea of being wounded by God, we can imagine the strong force of the impact of her desire upon the window of God, which is only salved by the embracing touch of his presence. Metaphorically, she was belaboured in the crash of love, in a smash of light. It is condign she thinks for her to suffer to be with Christ. These experiences generate a sense of belittlement, directed at her body, which she sees as an impediment to divine union. Although, at the same time, an awareness seems to evolve that the body is perhaps integral to being with God. She is prepared to admit a close connection between body and soul. The body must be acceptable, since Christ himself consented to take on human form, and so Mechthild must reflect that divine acknowledgment. She appreciates the vision of God's countenance—an appreciation that was modelled on seeing beauty in earthly things; yet, for her, this cannot ultimately compare to the beauty of heavenly things. Hence she envisions divine being with the spiritual senses in the soul, which are only adjuncts to the physical senses. Here then, she is ever moving towards the horizon of heaven while on earth, and in ecstatically flying higher she can see farther. Being in the mystical presence of God, her love feeds the stream of Desire overflowing her soul into her body; and she sees the face of God who reflects her desire back into her soul enabling it to grow wings and take flight (cf. *Phaedrus*, 255c–e).

CONCLUSION

The gendered association of body, soul, and God is a fraught theological issue. As an exponent of "bridal mysticism" Mechthild juxtaposed her projected female self—her soul—to the ostensibly masculinised godhead, or the triune divinity, reified particularly in the presence of Jesus Christ. The conjunctive relationship between body and soul is the place from which she mapped her relationship to God, but for those male mystics operating with a disjunctive relationship between body and soul, the place of mapping to God is removed to the soul. That Mechthild exemplified a somatic awareness of the proximity of God in her mystical outlook can be readily argued. This is so even if one

counts her imaginings as being derivative of spiritual vision, which are normally of images given in the soul, since she correlates her experiences analogically with the bodily senses. Accordingly, we may call it a "sensual" form of mysticism. It is true that Mechthild disdains and depreciates the body, vehemently so on occasion, but she also needs for doctrinal reasons to acknowledge the body as integral to being with God. Its earthly existence is, after all, an adumbration of its eventual heavenly existence (assuming of course, in her terms, that one follows a Christian holy life while on earth). Her attitude to the body is ambiguous, clearly platonic in outlook, initially at least, but as she becomes more mature and reflective she acknowledges the value of the body, at least so far as it is hylomorphically necessary for heavenly deliverance. She might not have always been explicitly affirming of the body, but she none the less accepted it as the gateway into eternity, into the field of heaven. It is fair to say that for Mechthild the body is to be held nearby, and the soul is a way station, as she steams on towards God.

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[2] Subsequent references to books of Plato are taken from the edited collection by Cooper (1997).

[3] Translations here are taken from Hett (1935), with citations to book and chapter, and with standard paragraph numbering.

[4] Aristotle here considers that the soul exerts the body without feeling any reciprocal effects; but he does admit elsewhere (*Physics* 7, in contradiction to *De anima*) that the soul is in spatial contact with the body, and indeed that the soul is moved by sensation or (sensory) pleasure occurring through the body. Such an interactionist position accords with Plato's views expressed in *Timaeus* (see Menn 2002, 85–90).

[5] According to Robinson (2000), in the *Timaeus* Plato evinces an androcentric view of creation, in saying that while in the beginning the demiurge created all souls equal the first generation of humans was entirely male. "As they died off and were duly reincarnated, those among them who had lived a 'cowardly' and, in more general terms, morally unsatisfactory life were reincarnated as women (!); those who had lived at various levels of *stupidity* were reincarnated as various types of bird or animal" (48). It seems that for Plato, who opined that men are physically stronger than women, the souls of men are analogously morally superior to those of women (49).

[6] Subsequent page references are to chapter 6 of Bynum 1995a, from which this discussion is drawn.

[7] While it is often the case that the medieval Christian mystics regarded the soul as the female other of the male God, and *anima* was referred to both grammatically and sexually as female, interestingly, by contrast, the body seems mostly to be referred to with the masculine pronoun (Drage Hale 1995, 9). Bynum (1995b, 17) remarks that the "soul (*anima*) was gendered feminine far more often than *corpus* (in part because of the grammar itself)."

[8] The definitive critical edition is Neumann (1990), with the corresponding English translation by Tobin (1998). In this paper, English citations are shown as *FL* and page number, and German citations as book, chapter, and line number (where necessary).

[9] "wahsende gerunge"; vliessende gwelunge"; "brinnende bevindunge sele und libes"; "stetú einunge mit grosser huote gebunden" (IV, 15.4–6).

[10] "das dú ungeruewige gotheit, dú iemer mere arbeitet ane arbeit, nit in sin sele mag vliessen." (V, 26.11–12)

[11] "suessem vlusse"; "suesse arbeit in wunnenklicher unruowe"; "den himmelschen vatter siner endelosen liebin, die er zuo des menschen sele treit." (VI, 16.11, 21, 25–26)

[12] Later she again refers to this image, as the body speaks to the soul: "When shall you soar with the feathers of your yearning to the blissful heights to Jesus, your eternal Love?" (*FL* 335; "Wenne wiltu vliegen mit den vedern diner gerunge in die wunneklichen hoehi zuo Jhesu, dime ewigen liebe?" VII, 65.13–15)

[13] "Ich wil mir selben machen ein brut, dú sol mich gruessen mit irem munde und mit irem ansehen verwunden, denne erste gat es an ein minnen" (III, 9.27–29).

[14] "Swenne du aber minnest, so werden wir zwoei ein sin" (II, 6.7); "Ich bin in dir und du bist in mir" (III, 5.12–13); "wenne si so verre in got verdoiet" (III, 10.22).

[15] Cf. "I cannot be completely intimate with her unless she is willing to lay herself in utter repose and nakedness in my divine arms, so that I can take delight in her." (*FL* 207; "ich mag ir nút vollen heimlich wesen, si welle sich rehte muessig und blos an minen goetlichen arm legen, und das ich muos mit ir spilen." V, 25.23–25)

[16] See, *inter alia*, *FL* 56, I, 37.6; *FL* 70, II 2.34; *FL* 109, III, 3.32; *FL* 114, III, 9.2; *FL* 117, III, 10.15; *FL* 119, III, 12.6; *FL* 139, IV, 2.8–9; *FL* 144, IV, 2.131–32; *FL* 153, IV, 12.25, 36; *FL* 166, IV, 21.17; *FL* 167, IV, 23.3; *FL* 185, V, 6.6; *FL* 193, V, 17.9; *FL* 210, V, 29.14; V, 33; *FL* 254, VI, 28.21–25; *FL* 254, VI, 29.2; *FL* 278, VII, 3.30; *FL* 280, VII, 6.6–7; *FL* 286, VII, 13.2; *FL* 305, VII, 36.3; *FL* 320, VII, 51.2; *FL* 335, VII, 65.15. Worthlessness is a quality she recommends others appreciate as they pray, *FL* 229; VI, 2.31–32.

[17] "Swenne ich aller menschen armeste an min gebet gan, so ziere ich mich nach miner unedelkeit, so kleide ich mich mit dem pfuole, der ich selber bin. Da nach schoehe ich mich mit der edelen zit, die ich verlorn han alle mine tage; und so gúrte ich mich mit der pine, die ich verschuldet habe. Da nach nime ich umbe mich einen mantel der bosheit, der ich vol bin; so setze ich uf min hovbet ein crone der heimlichen schemede, die ich wider got begangen han. Hie nach nime ich in min hant einen spiegel der waren bekantnisse; so besihe ich mich dar inne, wer ich selber bin. So sihe ich leider anders nit denne alles owe." (VI, 1.114–21)

[18] "spiegel miner súnden"; "neigen in den unvletigen pfuol mines herzen" (VII, 21.5 and 7, 9–10).

[19] "wand mir der tote hunt, min lichamen, ane underlas mit jamer zuo stinket" (III, 5.17–18). Also see *FL* 72, II, 3.49; *FL* 84, II, 20.4–5; *FL* 87, II, 23.14–15; *FL* 139, IV, 1.7.

[20] "Owe ich unselig phuol, wie ist mir nu geschehen? Joch bin ich leidor so selig nit, als ich mich da han gesehen." (II, 4.55–56)

[21] "Dir wirt keine gnade da von gegeben, das du einen pfuol anbettest." (IV, 2.54–55)

[22] "so vereinet sich die gotheit mit únser unschuldigen sele und mischet sich gottes menscheit mit únserm grúwelichen lichame," (IV, 8.9–10).

[23] "dem smakke únsers armen vleisches und … die wollust und krekine menschlicher sinne," (V, 22.33–35).

[24] "nider us von dem hohen palaste der heligen drivaltekeit in dise pfuolige welte" (VI, 1.14–15). Also, she warns that we poison ourselves "when we drink of the foul puddle of the world and make use of the baseness of our flesh according to the counsels of the evil spirit," (*FL* 161; "swenne wir trinken den pfuol der welte und nútzen die unedelkeit únsers fleisches na dem rate des boesen geistes," IV, 18.30–32).

[25] So sprichet der licham: "Eya frovwe, wa bist du nu gewesen? Du kumest so minnenklich wider, schoene und creftig, fri und sinnenrich. Din wandelen hat mir benomen minen smak, rúchen, varwe und alle min

maht." So sprichet si: "Swig, morder, la din klagin sin! Ich wil mich iemer huetten vor dir. Das min vient verwundet si, das wirret uns nút, ich froewe mich sin." (I, 2.29–34)

[26] "Do sach ich wol, das er min viant was, und sach das ovch: soelte ich dem ewigen tode entgan, so mueste ich in dar nider sclan, do mueste es an ein striten gan" (IV, 2.105–7). Also: "The body, too, sinks far down when it serves its enemy," being the soul (*FL* 183; V, 4.36–37 "Der licham sinket ovch vil sere, wenne er sinem viande dienet…").

[27] "grosse schirmeschlege"; "súfzen, weinen, bihten, vasten, wachen, besmenschlege und betten steteklichen an." (IV, 2.110–112)

[28] On this point of conformation see *FL* 62; I, 44.82: "Lady Soul, you are so utterly formed to my nature". Tobin comments that "ir sint so sere genatúrt in mich" is literally translatable as "you are so very natured into me" (1998, 343 n. 60).

[29] "das goetlich nature nu an ir hat bein und vleisch, lip und sele," (IV, 14.37–38). Also, "[t]he body receives its value from its relationship as brother of the Son of the heavenly Father and from the reward of his toils." (*FL* 257; "Der licham enpfat sin wirdikeit von dem sune des himelschen vatters an bruoderlicher geselleschaft und an dem lone der arbeit." VI, 31.16–17)

[30] "mit irem vleisch alleine husvro in dem himelriche"; "bi dem ewigen wirte, im selber allerglichest" (IV, 14.40–42).

[31] "milten gaben, die du mir, herre, ie geruochtest ze gebende an lip und an sele." (V, 35.21–22)

[32] Mechthild also uses this allusion of propinquity in reference to her personification of pain; that is, Lady Pain is the garment Mechthild wore next to her skin on earth (see *FL* 155; IV, 12.89–90).

[33] "in minnen brennen und lúhten in heligen lebenne, ... sol gottes minne in únsere sele und in únsern lichamen brennen und lúhten ane underlas" (VII, 32.14–16).

[34] "das got nie minnenklich in ir gesprach"; "der zuo zergenglichen dingen ist so liep," (III, 24.31–33).

[35] "gegen irme brútegovme und so sol liep zuo liebe komen, der lip zuo der sele," (III, 1.122–123).

[36] Also see *FL* 218; V, 35.31–34.

[37] "ein begriffenlich bilde siner ewigen gotheit"; "gruesset, vroewet und minnet ane underlas sin vleisch und sin bluot"; "sehent si in den spiegel der ewekeit"; "Die sele ist in dem lichamen gebildet menschen glich und hat den goetlichen schin in ir und schinet dur den lichamen als das lúhtende golt dur die clare cristallen." (VII, 1.93, 100, 107, 109–111)

[38] "mahte úns lip und sele in unzellicher minne"; "Adam und Eva waren gebildet und adellich genatúret na dem ewigen sune," (III, 9.34–35).

[39] "schemeliche lide"; "gekleidet mit engelscher wete" (III, 9.43–44).

[40] "ewige vatter"; "lobelich brut"; "verschaffen und grúlich gestalt"; "wer solte den unvlat in sich nemen?" (III, 9.68, 69, 72–73)

[41] "si smekket ein unbegrifliche suessekeit, die ir alle irú lider durgat"; "ist gemachet von heliger gerunge der sinne und von dem ersten teile der minne." (II, 19.53–56)

[42] "Vrowe sele, was wellent ir sust verre? Ir sint ie noch gekleidet mit der vinsteren erden." (III, 1.16–17)

[43] Cf. "Whenever a person in religious life seeks the comfort of the flesh without real necessity and in all his five senses, they become impure;" (*FL* 142; "Swenne ein mensche in einem heiligen leben gemach sines fleisches ane rechte notdurftekeit und an allen sinen fúnf sinnen suochet, so werdent si unkúsche," IV, 2.89–91).

[44] “do sach ich mit miner selen ovgen in himmelscher wunne die schoenen menscheit”; “bekante an sinem heren antlútte die heligen drivaltekeit,” (IV, 2.27–29).

[45] “des gotlichen antlútes der heligen drivaltekeit, dú únsern lip und únser sele sol durlúhten, also das wir da die wunderliche selekeit sehen und bekennen, die wir nu hie nit moegen nemmen.” (VI, 29.33–36)

[46] “[m]it unsprechlicher gruosse rueret er ir herze, das si schinet und lúhtet, also das der hohe gegenblik der heligen drivaltekeit vor únser frovwen antlize entstet.” (VI, 39.5–7)

[47] “únser sinne geoffenet und so wirt únser sele also clar, das wir sehen in die goetlichen bekantnisse als ein mensche sin antlize besihet in eime claren spiegel.” (VII, 7.15–17)

[48] “licham swebet so in unmenschlicher sanftekeit, und mine sinne bekennent unsprecheliche wunder in der usvart der sele.” (VI, 26.4–6)

[49] “unwirdig mensche”; “ze bekennende in den sinnen und ze beschowende mit der selen ovgen ein vúr, das brande ane underlas…” (VI, 29.3–4).

[50]“So nigen wir ime mit únser sele und mit únsern fúnf sinnen” (VII, 21.27).